

Discourse II

The son said to him: 'If there were not this carnal desire and if there were no private intercourse between husband and wife,

There would be no continuance of the creatures of this world and no order would be left in the universe.

Were it not for this dispensation and blending the whole of the kingdom would be in disarray.

Aye, a thousand and one persons must be set in order ere thou canst properly put a morsel of food into thy mouth.

It is by wisdom that those who minister in this way continue work from month to month.

The earth shines from foam and the heavens from smoke¹ because if something were not necessary it would not exist.

If it were not for carnal desire neither thou nor I should be in the world.

Thou wilt cast out carnal desire from men—inform my heart of the secret thereof.'

Father's reply

His father said to him: 'Heaven forbid that thou shouldst think that I would do away altogether with the thought of carnal desire.

But since thou hast chosen this from the world and hast both spoken and heard of this,

It is as though from a hundred worlds of secrets thou are conversant only with that of carnal desire.

I have told thee this in private that thou mayst step outside carnal desire.

When it is possible to be the confidant of Jesus who would wish to be the companion of an ass?

Why dost thou associate thyself with an ass in carnal desire, when thou couldst be closetted with Jesus?

Since, after all, this lust is a thing of one moment only, is it not better to have eternal privacy [with the loved one]?

Since the Eternal allows thee to be alone with Him for ever, forego the ephemeral, i.e. carnal desire.

For carnal desire such privacy is not desired—whoever does not possess this secret is defective.

But when carnal desire reaches its culmination, from carnal desire there is born passionate love without limit.

But when passionate love becomes very strong, there arises spiritual love.

When spiritual love reaches its uttermost limit, thy soul becomes annihilated in the loved one.

Forgo carnal desire, for it is not the goal: the root of everything is the loved one, the loved one.

If thou art cruelly slain in that pathway it is better than being entrapped in carnal desire.'

(1) Story of the woman who became enamoured of a prince²

'A king had a silver-breasted son in whose lovelock the Moon herself was ensnared.

No one beheld the face of that prince who did not turn the face of his heart towards that beauteous lad.

So much was he the wonder of the world, that the world, all of it, was his lover.

His eyebrows, which were of the same shape as a bow, were the two chamberlains at the door of the sultan, his soul.

When a man's eye saw the arrow of his eyelashes his heart would yield itself up to that arrow and choose to be a quiver to it.³

Who saw the eyebrows of that ravisher of hearts who did not make his heart a bow-case for that bow?

His mouth had joined together thirty gems and confined them within the two lustrous rubies of his lips.

The down on his cheeks⁴ issued *fatwas* for lovers: in beauty it was like his arched eyebrows.⁵

His chin, a ball struck bravely into the field, struck off the heads of brave men.

A woman became distraught with love of that fair one; her heart lamented much and turned to blood.

When separation from him gained the victory over her and thereby made her bewildered and sore of heart,

She spread ashes beneath her and, since she was fire, made them her abode.

All night she wailed for that fair one; now she wept blood, now she heaved a sigh.

If some day that fair one went out into the countryside, the hapless woman would run along on the road.

Like a ball she would run before his horse trailing her plaits like two polo-sticks.

She would gaze backwards upon that fair one; like rain she would scatter tears upon the road.

A hundred sergeants in succession beat her with their staves but she neither cried out nor made a disturbance.

A great crowd of people used to be spectators of this and would point the woman out to the men.

All the men were amazed at her, and the poor woman still remained in her bewildered state.

In the end, when this matter had exceeded all bounds, the prince's heart became grieved with this burden.

He said to his father: "How much of this mendicity? Deliver me from the disgrace of this woman."

The lofty king commanded as follows: "Bring that yearling straightway on to the square.

Bind her to his hindfeet by the hair and make him gallop fast across the crossroads,

So that the wretched woman may be torn to pieces and the world rid of her affair.

The horse will kill her on the highway like a rutting elephant, and the pawn will not again look at the king."⁶

The king and the prince went on to the square, and a great crowd of people stood watching,

All shedding tears of blood out of sorrow for that woman, and from that blood the ground became like a bed of pomegranate flowers.

When the soldiers rushed together to bind her hair to the horse's feet,

The poor distraught woman fell down before the king, she threw herself down in order to crave a boon.

"Since", she said, "thou wilt kill me, and that in cruel fashion, I have one last request—wilt thou grant it?"

The king said to her: "If thy request be that I spare thy life, know that I intend to take it.

And if thou say; 'Do not cause me to be dragged by the hair', I shall not shed thy blood otherwise than at the feet of the horse.

And if thou say, 'Give me grace for a little while', this is not possible without pardon.

And if thou ask to be together with the prince for a while, thou shalt not see his face."

The woman said to him: "I do not ask for my life nor do I ask for grace for a little while.

I do not say, O beneficent king, 'Do not put me to death dragged headlong by the feet of the horse.'

If the king of the world will grant it me, I have a request other than these four.

That request is all I ask until eternity." The king said: "Speak. What is that request? For if thou forgo those four thou shalt have whatever thou askest for."

The woman said to him: "If today thou must needs put me to death in wretched fashion under a horse's hooves,

This is my request, O Lord, that thou bind my hair to *his* horse's feet,

So that when the horse gallops for that purpose, he will abjectly kill me under the feet of his horse,

So that when I am slain by that fair one I shall in that way be alive for ever.
Aye, if I am slain by my beloved, from the light of love I shall be above the star Aiyuq.⁷

I am a woman. I have not so much manliness. My heart has turned to blood. It is as though I had no life left.

At such a time grant a woman like me, who deserves it, this small request, which it is easy to grant."

Because of the woman's sincerity and devotion the king's heart was softened. What do I say? From his tears the earth became mud.

He pardoned her and sent her to the palace; like one with a new life he sent her to her loved one.—

Come, O man, if thou art our companion, learn from a woman what true love is.

And if thou art less than women, cover thy head. Thou art not less than a catamite. Listen to this tale.'

(2) Story of the Alid, the scholar and the catamite who were taken prisoner in Rum⁸

'An Alid,⁹ a scholar and a catamite were carrying all their goods to Rum.

These three persons were waylaid by the infidels and dragged unexpectedly before the idol.¹⁰

The infidels said to the three: "You must needs worship the idol,

Otherwise we shall shed the blood of all three; we shall give you no grace but shall shed it now."

Those three masters said to those infidels: "You must give one night's grace,

So that we may consider in this one night whether it is possible to practise idolatry."

They gave those three persons one night's grace so that they might each commune with themselves.

The Alid spoke and said: "I must gird on the Christian's belt¹¹ before the idol,

For I have full authority from my ancestor;¹² he will intercede on my behalf tomorrow."

The scholar spoke and said: "I too cannot bid farewell to body and soul.

If I bow my head before the idol, I shall raise up an intercessor in my learning in the Faith."

The catamite said: "I am lost indeed, for I am left without the help of an intercessor.

Since you have an intercessor and I have not, this worship is not lawful for me.

If they cut off my head like a candle, why should I fear? I cannot worship an idol, for that is perdition.

I will not bow my head to the ground before the idol, even though they ruthlessly sever the head from my body."—

When those two preferred life the catamite in such a situation quitted him like a man.

A strange thing that at the time of testing it is the catamite who is to be praised for manliness!

When Qaruns¹³ go naked along this road, lions seek the protection of ants.

If thou art less than a catamite in thy love of what thou desirest, thou art surely not less than an ant upon this road.'

(3) Story of Solomon the son of David and the lovesick ant¹⁴

'Solomon, in the midst of all his occupations, passed by a swarm of ants on the roadside.

All the ants came forward to do obeisance; in an hour many thousands had come.

But one ant did not come quickly before him because there was a mound of earth in front of its home.

With the speed of the wind that ant was carrying out each separate particle of earth so that that mound might be cleared away.

Solomon summoned it and said: "O ant, I perceive thee to be without strength or endurance,

And yet if thou wert to acquire the lifespan of Noah and the patience of Job, thy task would not be accomplished.

This is no task for the arm of thy likes; thou wilt not cause this mound to disappear."

The ant opened its mouth and said: "O king, by high endeavour one can proceed along this road.

Look not at my constitution and build, have regard to the perfection of my endeavour.

There is a certain she-ant who is invisible to me and who had drawn me into the snare of her love.

She has said to me: 'If thou removest this mound of earth from here and clearest the way,

I will cast on one side the boulder of separation from thee and then sit together with thee.'

Now my loins are girded for this task; I know about nothing except this carrying of earth.

If this earth is made to disappear I can achieve union with her,

And if I die in this endeavour, at least I shall not be an idle boaster and a liar."—

Friend, learn of love from an ant; learn of such sight from one who is blind.

Though the ant's cloak is very black, yet it is one of the attendants on the road.

Look not with contempt upon an ant, for it too has passion in its heart.
I know not what state of affairs it is upon this road when a lion is chid by an ant.'

(4) Story of the Commander of the Faithful Ali and the ant¹⁵

'Ali was walking one day at noontide when he happened to injure an ant upon the road.

The ant was helplessly kicking its feet in the air and Ali was filled with distress at its impotence.

He was afraid and became exceedingly agitated: such a lion was overturned by an ant.

He wept a great deal and tried many devices to make the ant walk again.

In the night he saw Mohammed in a dream. Mohammed said to him:

"O Ali, hurry not along the road,

Because for two days thou hast filled the heavens with mourning on account of one ant.

Art thou heedless of where thou art treading that thou shouldst injure an ant upon the way?

—Such an ant as was full of secret meaning and whose activity it was to praise the name of God?"

Ali began to tremble in all his members—the Lion of God fell into a snare on account of an ant.

The Prophet said: "Be of good heart and do not worry, for that same ant interceded for thee with God,

Saying, 'O Lord, I had no wish to accuse Haidar.¹⁶ If he was an enemy to me he is so no longer.' "—

Know, O generous one, that it was from devotion to the Faith that such a lion behaved in such a way towards an ant.

What man, lion-like as Haidar in courage, hast thou seen bound to the saddle-bow of an ant?

Happy is he who is informed of the Truth and lifts and puts down his feet in accordance with God's commandment!

If thou walkest in absolute ignorance, thou art an absolute beggar even though thou art the son of kings.

One must look and then take a step, for one cannot take a step in the road without looking.

If thou take a step in the road without looking, in the end adversity will be thy reward.

When thou walkest blindly like an ass, thou art not distinguished from others by thy understanding.

Count thy steps as thou takest them if thou art a man of the road, for all is counted from the Moon down to the Fish.¹⁷

If thou take a step without any commandment, many a hurt wilt thou receive without any remedy.

If thou lift thy foot here for a short time, thou shalt not walk in thy grave for an eternity.

Whoever walks here for a time, consider that there he will walk for a hundred ages.

Though thou walkest here for a single moment, there it will be for a hundred eternities.

If today thou take one clean step, thou must not walk a hundred parasangs in the dust.

Alas! thou dost not see the great gain; if thou didst thou wouldst not desist a moment from thy work.

For every step that thou takest today thou shalt receive from God a delightful gift.

When such profit is possible every moment, why out of heedlessness must one suffer harm?

(5) Story of Nushirvan¹⁸ the Just and the aged cultivator¹⁹

Nushirvan was riding his horse with the speed of an arrow when he saw in the road an old man [bent] like a bow.

The old man was planting a number of trees. The king said to him: "Since thy hair has turned to milk,

And since thou wilt remain only a few more days, why art thou planting trees here?"

The old man replied: "There is reason enough. Since many have planted for us,

So that today we have the benefit thereof, we too are planting for others.

One should take each step in accordance with one's capacity, for in every step there should be order.⁵⁵

The king was pleased with the old man's speech. He filled his hand with gold and said: "Take this."

The old man said to him: "O victorious king, already today my trees have borne fruit.

For If I live to be over seventy thou knowest that I have not fared badly by this planting.

The planting did not make me wait ten years; it has borne gold as fruit this very day."

The king was even more pleased with this reply of his, and he bestowed upon him the land, the village and the water.—

Thou must perform thy labour today for without labour thou wilt have no fruit.

Thou must set thy foot on the road of the Faith, thou must lay aside vanity.

If thou art a man, then like a man make thy beard a broom for the privy.
Art thou not ashamed with all that strength of arm to place thy weight on the scales?
Thou art less than a dog. Listen to this story if thou think thyself more than a dog.'

(6) Story of Master Jandi²⁰ and the dog²¹

'Someone—and he was afraid of nobody—asked Master Jandi: "Art thou better or a dog?"

Jandi's disciples charged openly down upon him to tear him to pieces then and there.

Their master at once prevented them. He said to the man: "I am not aware of the decree of Destiny.

I have not ascertained, dear friend, what my case is—how then can I answer thee?

If my faith is greater than the rabble's, then I can say that I am better than a dog.

And should my faith not be greater than the rabble's, then would that I were even a hair's breadth better than a dog!"—

Since the veil has not yet fallen away, do not regard thyself as being in the least way superior to a dog.

For if the dog's road is through the dust, yet thou too art in the same case.'

(7) Story of Mashuq of Tus,²² the dog and the horseman²³

'Mashuq of Tus was walking out along a road one noontide like one beside himself.

A dog came towards him on that road and in his forgetfulness he all at once threw a stone at it.

He beheld in the distance a horseman clad in green coming up behind him, his face all light.²⁴

He struck him hard with a whip and said to him: "Have a care now, foolish one, have a care!

Dost thou know whom thou art throwing a stone at or that thou art by origin of the same nature as he?

Art not thou and he of one mould? Why dost thou consider him inferior to thyself?"—

Since the dog is not apart from the mould of Omnipotence, it is not lawful for thee to exalt thyself above a dog.

Dogs are concealed behind the curtain, friend. See whether thy kernel is purer than this shell.

For although the appearance of the dog is unattractive, yet in him are qualities that ensure him a high position.

The dog is in possession of many secrets, but his outward appearance belies this.'

(8) Shaikh Abu Sard's²⁵ argument with a Sufi over a dog²⁶

'A Sufi who was passing by struck with his staff at a dog lying on the road. The dog was badly hurt in its front leg; it began to howl and went off at a run.

It came howling before Abu Said and threw itself on the ground, its heart boiling with rage.

When it had shown Abu Said its foot, he rose up and sought justice of that heedless Sufi.

The shaikh said to the Sufi: "O man without faith, has anyone ever dealt with such cruelty to a dumb creature?

Hast thou broken its foot so that it has fallen down and become thus weak and helpless?"

The Sufi spoke and said: "O master, the fault was not mine but the dog's, Because it defiled my garment it received from my staff a blow not dealt in play."

Where the dog was lying it continued to howl and wave its legs.

That peerless shaikh said to the dog: "For all thou hast done, I will gladly take the responsibility. Pass thy sentence now and do not postpone it till the Judgment Day.

If thou wish me to give him his answer, I will punish him on thy behalf here and now.

I do not wish thee to become angry; I wish thee to be pleased."

The dog said: "O peerless shaikh, since I saw his garb to be that of a Sufi, I was certain that he would do me no harm. How was I to know that he would burn my limbs with pain?

Had there been someone clad in mail on the road, I should have been on my guard.

Seeing the garb of the people of peace I felt safe; I did not know the full story.

If thou wilt punish him divest him now of this garb such as is worn by [true] men,

So that all may be safe from his wickedness: the injury he did me was such as I have not endured from drunkards.

Remove from him the cloak of the people of peace and his punishment will suffice until the Day of Judgment."—

Since the dog holds such a position upon His road, it is forbidden for thee to set thyself above a dog.

If thou think thyself better than a dog, be sure that thou thinkest so because of thy doglike nature.²⁷

When they cast thee thus abjectly into the earth thou must fall head downwards,

Because as long as thou continuest to rear thy head there is no doubt that thy head will be bowed down even more.

Why boast so much about what is a handful of earth? For it was for the earth that they cut thy navel-string.

Those that are the lowest here be sure that they will be the purest there.

When men made themselves lowly like the earth they made body and soul pure in manliness.

The mighty ones on this road are elevated in rank because they have entirely renounced frowardness.'

(9) Story of Abul Fadi Hasan²⁸ and his words on his deathbed²⁹

'When Abul Fadi Hasan lay on his deathbed, someone said to him: "O thou, by whom the Holy Law is upheld,

When the Joseph of thy soul is saved from the pit, we shall bury thee in such-and-such a place."

The shaikh spoke and said: "Heaven forbid! for that is the place of the great and the pious.

How should I, who am no better than a hundred other wretches, wish to have my grave in such a place?"

They said to him: "O pure and good-hearted one, where dost thou wish thy dust to be?"

He opened his mouth with a soul filled with agitation and said "On the top of yonder hill my grave must be,

For there lies many a tavern-frequenter and likewise a number of profitless thieves.

There are also many gamblers there: all are sinners there.

Bury me also with them: lay my head at their feet.

I have always been a fit companion for them, for essentially I have always been like a thief.

I belong among those sinners; I have not the strength to stand amongst those perfect ones.

For if these people are in great darkness, yet they are near to the light of His mercy.

When in a place there is thirst in the extreme, in the end it attracts water to itself.

For whatever there is weakness the eye of mercy dwells there more often.'"